FIRST UCC WELCOME

Welcome, everyone!

Welcome to First UCC in Second Life!

My name is Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna, on behalf of our congregation and our co Pastors, Pastor Christine Ng, and Pastor Jamie, and our church we welcome you to our space.

We are First United Church of Christ and Conference Center in Second Life, a recognized congregation with full standing in the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ.

A place that welcomes you and wants you to know that:
No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

And WE are so happy to have you here with us today for this very special Culto Cuir.

Whether you're here in Second Life or joining us from somewhere around the world, ¡bienvenidos, familia!

Today, we're gathering to celebrate each other, honor our journeys, and share love and joy.

We may be meeting through screens and avatars, but the community we're building here is real, and so is the sacredness of this moment.

INVITATION -

Later in today's service, we will gather around an open table—a table where everyone is welcome.

For now, this is simply an invitation to prepare.

If you are joining us online, take a moment to find something to drink and something to eat—bread, a tortilla, something sweet, or whatever you have nearby.

Maybe it is a familiar flavor, something comforting, or something that reminds you of home.
Set those things beside you, and we will return to them later in the service.

Whatever you bring, and wherever you are, there is room for you at this table.

SOULFORCE WELCOME -

On behalf of Soulforce in collaboration with First United Church of Christ Second Live,
I want to welcome everyone to this Culto Cuir also called Church of the Queerly Beloved!

Soulforce is an international not for profit LGBTQIA+ organization fighting weaponized religion for almost 30 years!

We want to make it clear that this is not satire or a parody of church.

Although it may look different from what some are used to, this is a place of worship.

We celebrate our LGBTQIA+ community work to heal the wounds of spiritual violence by centering our lives and experiences.

Reminding us all that this is indeed a sacred space, because everyone here is sacred.

We gather together as sacred people, united in loving something together,
blessing one another and honoring our journeys, and strengthening each other in love and joy.

I am Alba Onofrio, aka Reverend Shameater here in Second Life, and I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of Soulforce.

We're so excited to be celebrating Culto Cuir with Pastor Yadi and First UCC in Second Life!

Part of the mission of Culto Cuir is to reclaim spaces we were told didn't belong to us.

We've held these gatherings in LGBTQ+ bars in Quito, Bogotá, and Mexico City, and also in a church in Durham, North Carolina.

And today, we're here in Second Life!
We are so excited!

This is a brand new world for us, but theological imagination is not limited to the physical realm.

Because the internet is a contested space, it can be deeply hostile, with algorithms that encourage polarization and amplify hateful narratives.

But it can also be a place of resistance, community, and love.

And that's what we're celebrating today, a space where we can come together beyond physical borders,
meet people we might never have met otherwise,
and play with our creativity in our appearances, and gender expressions without fear or shame.

So whether you're new to Second Life or you've been here for years, whether you're religious, spiritual, or neither, we're so glad you're here.

Let us celebrate together!

We'll begin with a short prayer led by Nadia Arellano from the Soulforce team.

A PRAYER TO DIVINE TENDERNESS - (NADIA)

"You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle.

You have recorded each one in your book."
Psalms 56:8

"For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior.

He will take delight in you with gladness.

With his love, he will calm all your fears.

He will rejoice over you with joyful songs."

Zephaniah 3:17
God, we come before you in pain.

Do you hear our prayers?

Like Thomas, we want to see your scars.

We do not want a perfect savior.

We want a savior whose body shows the wounds of injustice.

God, do you feel the fear and shame of those who were abused?

Do you feel our anger when we lose our loved ones too soon?

Do the wounds done in your name hurt you too, God?

We were told many times that we do not belong at your table.

But we are still here. We are hungry.

We are searching for you.
We are walking in places we were told were not for us.

What would our pastors say if they knew we found you in abortion clinics, at protests, and in queer bars?

What would our families say if they knew that while they prayed to change us, your voice was gently comforting us?

Jesus, fully human and fully divine, you know what it means to live in contradiction.

Holy Spirit, you who move over darkness, move with us now through uncertainty and despair.

Creative Source, bless our curiosity, our courage, our stubbornness, and our doubts.

You are with us in panic attacks, in the urge to vomit on Sunday mornings, in sleepless nights filled with tears and prayer, when we begged to be “cured”.

You are Divine Tenderness.

You call us by our chosen name.

You are with us inside and outside the closet.

You hurt when your children are hurt.

Come cry with us. Come dance with us.

Teach us to care for one another.

Teach us to repair harm.

Teach us to ask for forgiveness from love, not from fear.

Cover us with your disruptive love.

Strengthen our spirits.

Embrace our friends.

Protect us from those who claim to act in your name.
Amen.

INTRO TO CEL'S PERFORMANCE - Rev. Yadi

What is a queer worship service without a little drag?

I first met Cel when they were sixteen at YFT, an LGBTQ+ youth center where I volunteered.

A few decades later, we reconnected, and I told them how that time—and young people like them—inspired me to create Color Splash Out.

I asked, “Would you join me?”

And Cel said yes. Since then, Cel has served as a House Leader—what we call our camp counselors

—and this year they will lead our Variety Extravaganza, helping our younglings who love to perform at our end of camp yearly celebration express themselves.

Through their drag, Cel connects with others—especially disabled and queer people—helping them feel seen, celebrated, and free to express every part of who they are.

And isn't that what Culto Cuir is about—celebrating who we are without fear, shame, or apology?

Soulforce familia, please give a big, fabulous welcome to Cel!

CEL'S PERFORMANCE -

Thank you.

As they said, my name is CEL, I use rolling pronouns and I've been out as pansexual since 9th grade.
Clearly when life told me to pick one gender and one sexuality I said YES… the whole menu please.

One of the things I love most about drag is that it allows me to bring so many parts of myself into one space.
I've always been a creative person but drag is something that allows me to be even more outrageous and over the top, with way less fear that I'm doing too much.

To quote Lindsay Lohan from Mean Girls – "THE LIMIT DOES NOT EXIST".

I also have way less stress about doing something 'right'.

When I perform in an orchestra, or in a group color guard dance routine, there is DEFINITELY one way to perform, and you'll get shamed for not blending in.

BUT when its my solo performance?

I can do practically anything that I'm willing and able to do- which comes in clutch as a disabled person who certainly would not be caught dead doing a dip…
AKA (Also known as) a death drop.

My first experiences in drag would be playing as the lead male villain in a 7th grade play and binding in high school- every time gave me so much euphoria.
In contrast, in my early 20s I'd only do drag makeup alone, hurriedly washing it off before my abusive cishet ex would come home.

Fast forward to now, 8 years later, after finding myself again, drag has allowed me the freedom to explore my identity in ways that feel safe, low committal and most importantly fun!

Dancing, singing, expressing yourself is also medicine, indigenous medicine, that connects us with others around the world and across generations.

Unlike most of the contestants on RuPauls Drag Race, I've never actually performed in a gay bar.

Its true, I share my experience with the infamous season 12 contender Aiden Zhane - the self-described "bedroom queen".

For him it was largely due to lack of access to gay bars small in a town – "Booo"(impression of/quote from Aiden Zhane).

For me there's no shortage of gay bars in Dallas but so far its felt safer for me to start small,
with my friends and with my accepting church- where I can built trust with the people around me first.

Drag can be a protest, hilarious, or just a good time. You don't need expensive makeup,
a stage, a particular body type, or a certain gender identity.

It doesn't have to be only one thing, and neither do we.

So without further ado, let me show you what drag looks like, my way.

(Cel's song)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yn8CyVJgoW8

Valencia Grace's lyrics speak to the harm that can happen when some religious communities try to control who we're allowed to be.

I know that pain personally. It's hard to believe you're worthy of love when the very places that teach love, show you that you don't belong.

Everyone deserves a place where they don't have to choose between being who they are and being loved.
For me, rediscovering drag was only made possible after finding people and spaces where I don't have to hide parts of myself to feel accepted.

Whether it's an in-person gathering or an online community, we all deserve a place where we don't have to hide who we are.
….
Thank you everyone for having me, and huge kudos to all the organizers of the event,

so many epic people doing a lot of work on the backend to plan, advertise and run this.

Please direct all cash tips to them!

And with that, I vanish into the lavender mist. Drag you later!

INTRO TO ILAN'S PERFORMANCE - Rev. Yadi

I would like to introduce my very good friend who joined us all the way from La Isla del Encanto,
Puerto Rico!

I want to introduce you to someone who holds a very special place in my heart.

Ilan is a proud transgender man, a seminarian in Puerto Rico, and someone whose faith journey I have had the sacred privilege of witnessing.

A while back in 2022, I had the beautiful honor of affirming Ilan in baptism, celebrating his name,
his identity, and the sacred truth of who God has created him to be.

Ilan reminds us that faith is not about hiding who we are, but embracing the sacredness of who we are and sharing those gifts with the world.

And today, he came to share one of those gifts with us!

So, First UCC in Second Life, Soulforce familia, let's open our hearts and give a big, loving welcome to our brother, our sibling in faith, Ilan!

¡Bienvenido, hermano! This space is yours!

7. ILAN'S PREFORMANCE -

God bless to all here in First UCC Second Life.

I'm Ilàn Carlos. I'm from the East side of Puerto Rico.

I'm a musician with multiple instruments under my belt, founder and conductor of the Coro LGBT+ de Puerto Rico and first trans seminarian at one of the top seminaries in the Caribbean.

My calling is in ordained ministry and bringing visibility to the transgender and gender diverse community in the life of the church.
I feel blessed and honored to be here.

God bless. Peace and grace unto all.

(Play Ilan's song)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NggNyIbAVcs, Ilan

INTRO TO ALE'S PERFORMANCE - (Nadia)

Up next, we have Ale Ara, from our Teología Sin Vergüenza team, who will share a spoken word poem called Un acto de fe, or An Act of Faith.

It's about reclaiming something that has been used against so many of us: the language of faith.

Words like blessing, family, and even faith itself don't belong to fundamentalists.

They're ours, too.

And we get to decide what they mean, what we believe in, and what kind of world we want to build together.

Please welcome Ale!

ALE'S PERFORMANCE -

Un Acto de Fe (An Act of Faith by Ale Ara)

Intencionarlo hasta verlo, olerlo, probarlo, sentirlo, concretarlo.
Will it into being until we can see it, smell it, taste it, feel it, make it real.

Intercionarlo como mantra y hechizo.
Will it into being like a mantra, like a spell.

Ponerle fueguito, carlocito y chineo hasta la cosecha, el parto.
Give it a little fire, a little warmth, a little loving care, until the harvest, until its birth.

Intencionarlo con todas las fuerzas hasta lograrlo.
Will it into being with everything we've got until we make it happen.

Un acto de fé, de eso hablo!
An act of faith, that's what I'm talking about!

Que los fundamentalistas nos robaron el vocabulario!
The fundamentalists stole our vocabulary!

Lo declaró mío y de las que quieran usarlo!
I claim it for myself and for anyone who wants to use it!

Lo declaro mío y de las que lo usan sin pensarlo!
I claim it for myself and for those who use it automatically without a second thought!

Lo declaró mío y de las que estamos hartas de que nos estén matando!
I claim it for myself, and for those of us who are sick and tired of being killed!

Así es esto, de algo hay que agarrarnos!
This is how it goes; we've got to hold on to something!

No se trata de imponer rituales y mandatos!
It's not about imposing rituals and rules!

Se trata de vibrar por algo,
It's about believing in something,

de sentirse viva siendo la versión que queramos.
about feeling alive in the chosen version of ourselves.

Yo encontré la divinidad en cada abrazo!
I found the divine in every embrace!

Agarrar la teoría y usarla para algo!
Taking all that theory and actually doing something with it!

Para crear otra munda en la que seamos libres de amarnos!
Building another world where we're free to love each other!

Amarnos como queramos!
To love however we want!

Ya basta de un mundo con ellos gobernando!
Enough already of this world where they hold all the power!

Ya basta de mitos de machos!
Enough already of the myths of men!

Ya basta de democracias donde nosotras nunca ganamos!
Enough already of democracies where we never win!

Ya se cayó,
It's already fallen!

Creemos otra munda con nuestras manos!
Let's build another world with our own hands!

Ya se cayó,
It's already fallen!

Lo que queda son patadas de ahogado!
What's left is just desperate flailing!

Ya se cayó,
It's already fallen!

Ellos lo saben y están cagados!
They know it, and they're scared shitless!

Ya se cayó,
It's already fallen!

Solo falta atrevernos a hacer lo que soñamos!
All that's left is to dare to do what we've been dreaming of!

Dar ese paso y lograrlo,
To take that step and make it happen.

Mandar el CV y tener un trabajo digno con salario.
To send that résumé and get a decent job with decent pay.

Liderar la comunidad con micrófono en mano.
To lead our communities, microphone in hand.

Abortar si eso es lo que me libera.
To have an abortion if that's what sets me free.

Tenerlo si con eso yo soy feliz que es lo que interesa.
To have the baby if that's what makes me happy, because that's what matters.

Un acto de fé, de eso habló.
An act of faith, that's what I'm talking about!

De darle el valor a la vela que mi mamá puso para que me dieran el trabajo.
It's about honoring the power of the candle my mother lit so I'd get that job.

De la bendición de mi abuela cuando migre por amor lejos de mi rancho.
[the power] of my grandmother's blessing when I moved far from my hometown for love.

De las ancestras maestras guiando mis pasos.
[the power] of the ancestors, women wisdom keepers guiding my steps.

De los ángeles que escucho si estoy presente en lo que voy pasando.
[the power] of the angels that I can hear when I'm truly present.

Un acto de fé, de eso hablo.
An act of faith, that's what I'm talking about!

De ser mamonas cuando sabemos algo!
About being loud and proud when we know our shit!

Decirlo alto sin intimidarnos
About saying it out loud without letting anyone intimidate us

Gritarlo si es necesario.
Screaming it if we have to.

Disculparme por haber lastimado
Apologizing when I've hurt someone

Hacerlo rápido si alguien está llorando
Saying it quickly when they’re in tears

Por algo que yo hice o dije y no lo ví de inmediato.
because of something I said or did, even if I didn't realize it at first.

Un acto de fé, de eso hablo.
An act of faith, that's what I'm talking about!

Reclamó como mío ese vocabulario:
I'm reclaiming this vocabulary as my own:

FAMILIA, BENDICIÓN, y TRABAJO
FAMILY, BLESSING, and WORK

Familias diversas como los anos.
Families as diverse as anuses

Bendiciones del alma para aligernos el paso.
Soul blessings to lighten our steps.

Trabajo digno siempre y el doble de salario.
Dignified work, always, and double the pay!

Repito.
I'll say it again.

Trabajo digno siempre y el doble de salario.
Dignified work, always, and double the pay!

Nunca más subempleadas sosteniendo bananos.
Never again underemployed, carrying bananas.

Nunca más explotadas sosteniendo un mundo dónde no mandamos.
Never again exploited, holding up a world where we aren’t in charge!

Somos diosas en la tierra con crew de diosas en la espalda caminando.
We are goddesses on earth, with a crew of goddesses at our backs, walking together!

Aquí ya no hay paso para machos y sus arrebatos.
There's no more room here for patriarchal men and their tantrums!

Aquí empezamos a crear otra munda sin ellos estorbando.
Here, we start building another world without them getting in the way!

Aquí empezamos a poner otros límites sin ellos protagonizando.
Here, we start setting new boundaries without making them the center of everything!

Un acto de fé, de eso hablo!
An act of faith, that's what I'm talking about!

REVERSE ALTAR CALL -

Reverse Altar Call & Symbolic Apology by faith leaders (Rev. Alba & Rev. Yadi)

Rev. Alba: The Altar is a place where many of us have experienced harm, and particularly during the time of the altar call.

Often the altar call is where people are asked to come forward to confess their sins and pray the sinner's prayer and be saved.

For many, this moment has created guilt and shame.

Coming forward can make a person feel exposed and vulnerable.

It can make people feel unworthy of God's love.

Too often prayer has been used to discipline, to control, and to remind people of religious authorities who are over them.

Today, we transform this ritual, because we believe prayer should be an act of love and support.

Today, you do not come forward to ask for forgiveness.

We do.

As faith leaders, we are people entrusted with power from the institution of Church.

It is our responsibility to use that power to heal hearts and embolden spirits.

As LGBTQ people, we also recognize that this spiritual power has also been used to harm.

We hold both sides of the truth that religion and power have often colluded for the benefit of those with power.

If you were someone who was told that YOU are the problem or that your gender expression or sexual orientation is the sin, we are here to tell you that that is a lie.

You are not sinful because of who you are and who God created you to be.

Today we come to the altar as ordained Christian clergy to ask you for your forgiveness for the sins of the Church and of faith leaders like us.

I am so sorry. Let us begin the work of healing together.

Rev. Yadi: Wherever your body is right now, open your hands—palms facing upward.

Imagine that the guilt, shame, painful words, memories, and Scripture used to wound you have been placed into your hands.

Now slowly close your hands around that weight.

Notice how it feels. Is it sharp? Heavy?

Has it been there for a long time?

If the pain feels especially difficult, loosen your fingers only a little.

You do not have to release everything at once.

Healing is not a performance, and you do not have to force your hands open before you are ready.

Silently name what you are ready to let go of today.

When you are ready, begin opening your hands—one finger at a time, if necessary.

Now look around the sanctuary and watch the balloons rise.

Imagine that each balloon carries something we were never meant to hold: guilt, shame, fear, rejection, and every lie that told us we were unworthy.

Let them rise.

You do not have to carry that weight anymore. You are worthy of freedom, healing, beauty, and restoration.

As your hands open, may they become ready to receive something new: life, love, joy, and the sacred truth that you have always been worthy.

CELEBRATION OF A QUEERED COMMUNION

Rev. Alba: Now, we're going to celebrate the Holy Communion, but of course, we are going to make it queer, of course!

In our community, we have had too much bloodshed!

Too many broken bodies and spirits.

Too many Queer and Trans and Disabled and Black and Brown bodies on the cross with Jesus.

At Culto Cuir, we celebrate the open table of God through a communion of sweetness and healing and abundance using milk and honey,
inspired by the work of Christian Mujerista and Latin American feminist theologians who reimagined communion together through milk and honey rather than blood.

Together we remember God’s promise of a land flowing with milk and honey.

A promise of a place of peace, of abundance, and a life where all of our people can flourish.

Rev. Yadi: If you don't have milk or honey with you today, that's perfectly okay!

Earlier in the service we invited you to find something to drink, something sweet to eat, or simply something that brings you joy. and reminds you of that promise of safety and abundance.

Maybe it's a familiar flavor, something comforting, something that reminds you of home.

Whatever makes you feel like you've arrived somewhere safe, somewhere where you belong, somewhere where you can finally be yourself.

Whatever that is for you, we invite you to bring it to God’s open and abundant table today.

Here in the Rio Grande Valley, in Brownsville, Texas—along the border between Brownsville and Matamoros, México—
we gather in a place where nations meet, cultures embrace, and the Spirit knows no borders.

Before us is a table with pan dulce, oat milk, and honey—simple gifts that remind us of home, sweetness, nourishment, and God’s promise of abundance.

And we are not gathering alone. Across cities, countries, time zones, computer screens, and Second Life, we gather as one global familia.

We may be meeting online, but this connection is real.

Our prayers are real. Our presence is real. This community is real.

So bring what you prepared earlier. Whether you have bread, a tortilla, pan dulce, coffee, juice, water, or simply something that brings you joy—bring it now.

Rev. Alba: God’s promise of a land flowing with milk and honey came to a people in bondage, a people who were struggling to survive under the noose of domination.

People who cried out to the Divine, “We need you now, God! We can’t do this without you.

We need another world, another way, we want to live and love in freedom.”

And God responded, the Divine power came alongside human power to make a way out of no way,
to make the impossible possible, and the ancient Hebrews worked toward a possibility,
toward a horizon, a future that God has promised us all, a world in which everyone is enough and has enough,
a world of abundance, symbolized here by the sweetness of milk and honey.

Rev. Yadi: Welcome to God’s open table, where no one is denied, where all are welcome to partake in the blessing of God’s love and the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey.

Rev. Yadi: : Oh God, this is your wide open table, where we celebrate the wild and vast diversity of your creation, and us as part of it.

All: Our diversity is sacred, and no one can take that away!

Rev. Yadi: Oh God, this is your wide open table, where we remember your promise to stand by our side when we fight for equality and justice.

All: Our struggle is sacred, and no one can take that away!

Rev. Yadi: Oh God, this is your wide open table, where we proclaim the abundance of your divine love for all.

All: Our love is sacred, and no one can take that away!

Rev. Yadi: As we take and eat (pause to eat) and drink, (pause to drink).

May this Holy Communion be nourishment for the journey.

Amen! and Ashe!

PRAYER FOR OUR MOTHER (Rev. Alba)

Now, we invite you to close this communion time with a different version of a prayer many of us grew up hearing: the Lord's Prayer.

For centuries, we've been taught to imagine God as Father, but feminist and queer theologians remind us that the Divine is much bigger than any one name, gender, or image.

So today, we pray to Our Mother, reclaiming this familiar prayer as one of liberation and hope for a different world:

Our Mother, who dwells among us, hallowed be Thy names,

Thy love shall reign and peace remain on earth as it is in Heaven and give to us now

Your holy pow’r to fight for our liberation as we resist those who seek our domination and lead us not into desperation
but deliver us to the New Creation for Life has the power and Yours, the glory and ours, the freedom, forever and ever.
Amen.

INTRODUCTION FOR JADE'S PERFORMANCE - Rev. Yadi

Our next performer is someone very special to me.

In real life, she is Samantha—but here in Second Life, she is Jade.

Jade is a cultural performer, dancer, teacher, and choreographer right here in the Rio Grande Valley.

She is also my querida amiga, a proud and committed ally, and the Director of Color Splash Out.

Her commitment to LGBTQ+ youth and their ally friends goes far beyond words.

She works to create safe and brave spaces where culture, race, queer identity, and the experiences of young people on the spectrum are honored—so everyone can feel seen, safe, connected, and celebrated.

She does not just talk about allyship and belonging; she puts them into motion—sometimes literally, one dance step at a time.

Soulforce familia, please give a big, warm, borderlands welcome to the talented Jade!

JADE'S PERFORMANCE (Samantha)

“Hello everyone! I am Jade and I am so excited to be here!

Thank you so much for the invitation to join today’s service.

It is always a pleasure to celebrate life with my community and what better way to celebrate life than to sing and dance together?! Hit it DJ!”

BENEDICTION AND CONFETTI DROP - (Rev. Yadi)

Before we go remember we are here every Sunday at the same time in this space online.
And Soul Force can be found at: https://soulforce.org

And now for the Send Off

SEND OFF -

Familia, this is not the ending—it is the sending!

We opened our hands and released what was never ours to carry.

We gathered at a table of sweetness and remembered:

Our bodies are sacred.

Our love is sacred.

Our joy and our fight for liberation are sacred.

So go with sweetness on your tongue, rhythm in your body, holy fire in your spirit, and enough queer trouble to make the powers nervous!

The Spirit knows no borders—and neither does love.

You belong.

You are beloved.

You are free.

Now, familia:

Three… two… one… RELEASE THE CONFETTI!

¡Que viva el amor!

¡Que viva nuestra familia cuir!

Amen, Ashe, Que así sea!

Let's dance!

SONG TO DANCE

Let's dance!

Diana Ross-Im Coming Out(Lyrics)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuvGXxf7oNI&list=RDZuvGXxf7oNI&start_radio=1

Go in peace!